

**NARRATOR: Eshelman, Harold**

**INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves**

**DATE: March 8, 2001**

**LOCATION: Boise, Idaho**

**PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting**

**Tape**

<b>Counter</b>	<b>Summary</b>
000	[Interviewer's note: The tape's introduction is later on side one of this tape. The interview begins with Eshelman talking.] Eshelman and his wife worked on a lookout on Scott Mountain in the Boise National Forest. He shows the interviewer a map, called a fire finder, which helped him and his wife pinpoint the location of any fire they spotted. He then explained the procedure that a lookout went through after he and/or she spotted smoke in the forest.
070	Eshelman and his wife were newlyweds when they spent the summer on a lookout. He talked about how he and his wife felt about spending their first months in marriage in the forest. He mentioned some problems with spending the summer as lookout, mainly because they could not leave the lookout. Eshelman left for basic training during the summer, so his wife's brother came and spent the rest of the summer with her.
120	Eshelman offered his opinions on the importance of lookouts in terms of fire control. He recalled that he and his wife spotted eighteen fires that summer.
155	Eshelman said his family always enjoyed the outdoors; they always fished or hunted or camped in the forest. He had majored in forestry in college. A family friend, who worked for the forest service, convinced him to work for the forest service during one summer. All of these things stimulated an interest in forestry and forest fire fighting.
185	Eshelman's first job for the forest service was as a member of the brush crew. He talked about what someone in the brush crew would do. Eshelman also worked as a patrolman during his first years. He talked about that job and watching a smokejumper jump on a fire.
215	Eshelman recalled his first fire he fought with his friend and co-worker, Roger Warrick. Eshelman said the weather was so cold that they almost froze to death after they contained the forest fire. He and his friend had to light a fire to keep them warm.
260	After his first summer, Eshelman returned to college at Boise Junior College. He then returned to the forest service the next summer. Eshelman described some other jobs and ranger district that he worked on

during his first years with the forest service. He continued to talk about how patrolmen worked on “Pre-Fire Suppression.”

- 295 Eshelman attended Boise Junior College for more than two years, because of his grades and his need to make money to pay for college.
- 315 While stationed at Garden Valley, Eshelman worked at three main jobs. He talked about those jobs and the big fires that burned during his time at Garden Valley. The two fires he recalled was the Lightning Creek fire and the Kirkham Hot Springs fire. He detailed why these two fires stuck out in his memory.
- 360 Forest fire training, for non-smokejumpers, differed from smokejumping training. Eshelman talked about the training involved in fighting forest fire. He never attended a fire school (except as a trainer); he learned from experiencing forest fire with his co-workers. He explained the difference between Bureau of Land Management fire fighters and forest service fire fighters. He said that through experience he (and other fire fighters) learned the importance of knowing what crews were coming to fight the project fires.
- 425 Eshelman offered his opinions on putting foresters in charge of a fire, as opposed to putting a fire control (or management) officer in charge of a fire.
- 450 When Eshelman worked as a fire trainer, he tried to teach new crew people with book training and with practical, hands-on experience. He detailed specific protocols that one can learn only through fighting fires.

**END OF SIDE ONE**  
**TAPE ONE SIDE TWO**

- 000 Eshelman described the types and changes in communication—before, during, and after a fire—during his time as a fire fighter. He also offered his opinions on the importance of communication during, particularly project, fires.
- 050 With prompting from the interviewer, Eshelman talked about the tools that fire fighters took to fires, including the Pulaski, a shovel, and saws.
- 080 When Eshelman worked at Garden Valley, the ranger asked the fire crew to bring tools back from fires they worked on in other ranger district. He explained why this ranger wanted his fire crew to do that. People gave the nickname, “Bill Winkler and His Forty Thieves,” to the crew that Eshelman worked on. On a related story, Eshelman described bringing a

truck back from a fire that belonged to a person, Bob Entwistle, from another district.

125 Eshelman described another piece of equipment—hand-held or large water pumps—and his opinions on the use of water pumps to fight fire.

155 Another important aspect of fire fighting was aerial transport or fire suppression. Eshelman offered his memories of helicopters and airplanes to aid in controlling fires.

195 Eshelman talked about having to walk out from a controlled fire. He felt that pack out was easier than the pack in, usually because of the decreased weight (less food and water) on the way out.

230 In regards to physical training, Eshelman felt that the job itself got the fire fighters into physical shape to battle blazes. He also mentioned that aggressive fire fighting was the norm during his years with the forest service. Eshelman felt that the on-the-job training helped him with all aspects of fighting fire.

270 Eshelman worked at three different ranger districts in the Boise National Forest. Eshelman talked about the districts in the Boise National Forest, and the number of total fires he fought (86) during his tenure. He also mentioned fighting fire in other states, including the large fire he fought, called the Donner Summit fire in California and Nevada. He detailed numerous aspects of that fire, including building fire line within the project fire.

300 With prompting from the interviewer, he talked about one story on the Donner Summit fire. On project fire, crews fight and monitor just one area of the fire and fire line. He talked about another crew's whose fire line failed, and this crew did not want Eshelman's crew's help.

345 Eshelman talked about camaraderie as one aspect of fighting, particularly large or project, fires. He offered one particularly fire—the Daggett Creek fire in 1960—as an example crews knowing each other and working together. He said, "You knew your crew," meaning that his crew worked hard and did not put up with people shirking their responsibilities.

370 Don Reed, a fire control officer, was, according to Eshelman, one of the best fire bosses that Eshelman worked with. Eshelman offered his opinions on what attributes made a good fire boss. He explained the chain of command on a project fire and what types of leaders on a project did what jobs.

- 465 Eshelman discussed the “Fire Triangle,” which is fuel, heat, and oxygen. He then talked about why the afternoon heat and wind hinder fire suppression tactics.
- 490 **END OF SIDE TWO**  
**TAPE TWO SIDE ONE**
- 000 [No introduction.] Eshelman continued his discussion of the “Fire Triangle.” He talked about techniques, such as fighting fires at night and lighting backfires.
- 015 Eshelman talked about proscribed burning as a tool to help control or manage summer fires. He mentioned that whoever leads the control burning must understand the terrain and the weather before he or she starts the burning. He also talked about proscribed burning in the fall, and a specific that he and Don Reed set while planting trees that burned for three months.
- 060 Eshelman explained why the Forest Service planted trees in inclement weather, usually during the spring or fall. He felt that was the best time for the tree to take root and grow.
- 080 During one project fire, the Thorn Creek fire—which burned at the same time as the Daggett Creek fire in 1960—Eshelman led one crew of 14 and 15 year old boys. He felt that these boys took direction and fought fire as well as any crew he led.
- 115 During Eshelman’s time fighting fire in the forest service, different types of crew could battle blazes. Eshelman explained why they hired people from outside of the area of the fire, including volunteers. He offered his opinions why volunteers may not be the best crew to fight fires. Eshelman continued to talk about loggers as people who worked hard to fight fire. He also mentioned National Guard troops fighting fires when Eshelman served on the Idaho City ranger district.
- 215 According to Eshelman a fire boss should always be fearful for his or her crew. He talked about always having and discussing the escape plan before battling a blaze. He talked about one particular fire where the fire blew-up and burned his fire pack. On that fire Eshelman injured his elbow through excessive work and through changes in weather (a rain storm came through during the fire).
- 265 On one fire on the Salmon National Forest, Eshelman and his crew saw fresh bear tracks on the fire line. He called a helicopter to fly over and scare the bear away from the area.

295       The interviewer felt that the forest service was constantly caught between  
“a rock and a hard place.” Eshelman gave his opinion about the  
interviewer’s hypothesis; he felt that during the 1950s and 1960s the  
attitudes and the key players were different. He said that the forest service  
employees basically got along with everyone. He offered his opinions  
about the current problems the forest service has faced with different  
groups, such as loggers and environmentalists.

360       **END OF SIDE ONE**  
          **END OF INTERVIEW**

**NAMES AND PLACES INDEX**

Baker, Robert "Spike"  
Boise Junior College  
Boise National Forest  
Daggett Creek Fire (Idaho, 1960)  
Donner Summit Fire (Nevada/California border)  
Entwhistle, Bob  
Garden Valley, Idaho  
Grimes Creek Fire  
Idaho City, Idaho  
Kirkham Hot Springs Fire (Idaho)  
Landmark Ranger Station (Idaho)  
Lightning Creek Fire (Idaho)  
Reed, Don  
Salmon National Forest  
Scott Mountain Lookout (Idaho)  
Swanson, Carl  
Thorn Creek Fire (Idaho)  
Thrash, Jim  
Warrick, Roger  
Winkler, Bill

**NARRATOR: Eshelman, Harold**

**INTERVIEWER: Troy Reeves**

**DATE: April 10, 2001**

**LOCATION: Boise, Idaho**

**PROJECT: Smokejumping/Forest Fire Fighting**

**Tape**

<b>Counter</b>	<b>Summary</b>
000	Introduction.
010	Eshelman explained the term, "getting a fourth on a fire." He and his wife served on a lookout and spotted a fire in Baker, Oregon. He tried to determine how far away the lookout was from the fire in Oregon.
035	Eshelman had not heard of the "10 a.m. Policy." He did talk about how they attacked fires during his time with the forest service. He said their attack plan "was you get there, and you get it [the fire] out." He talked about additional protocols, including aerial searching for fires, regarding fire control.
085	Reeves asked Eshelman to describe a "smoker" fire; Eshelman said that type of fire was one that erupted several days after the lightning caused the fires.
100	During a "typical" day during fire season, Eshelman worked on fire suppression, pre-suppression, and recreation. He explained those aspects and how they affected him during the "typical" day. He talked about various locations around Idaho City, including Mores and Robie Creek, where he had recreation officers patrolling during a summer day. According to Eshelman, most recreation officers took their days off during the week, because they all need to patrol during the weekend, because that is when the people spent their time in the forest.
165	Eshelman, as a pre-suppression or recreation officer, did not initially attack fires, but he did arrive on some fires first. He talked about how sometimes they used volunteers to help battle blazes. He felt volunteers did not make the best fire fighter.
200	People who fought fires in the national forest carried a fire pack. Eshelman described what he kept in his pack. He also talked about the smokejumpers that fought fires along side him in Idaho City and other locations in the Boise National Forest.
260	With prompting from the interview, Eshelman told a story about having retardant drop on him and Ken Smith during a forest fire. They saw the

retardant plane, but they thought it would not drop its load on them. Smith has lost his hard hat, so the retardant soaked his face and hair.

330 On the same fire, a retardant plane dropped its load on one burning snag, and the pilot then maneuvered the plane between two trees. Eshelman said that was the best flying he had seen.

380 Eshelman told another story about a pilot dropping cargo on the Goat Creek fire near Salmon, Idaho. Eshelman felt a deep respect for pilots.

405 The biggest fire that Eshelman fought was the Donner Summit fire on the Nevada-California border. Eshelman told a story (that he had told in the previous interview) about that particular fire.

445 The worst fire for Eshelman was the Kirkham Hot Springs fire. Eshelman talked about why that fire was difficult to suppress.

465 **END OF SIDE ONE**  
**TAPE ONE SIDE TWO**

000 With prompting from the interviewer, Eshelman continued to describe the Kirkham Hot Springs fire. He continued to discuss another fire, the Thorn Creek fire. Eshelman and two other fire fighters tried to prevent a fire from reaching a haystack. The fire burned through their shirts.

045 During the Thorn Creek fire, Eshelman encountered a porcupine that had been lit on fire. Eshelman killed the creature to put it out of its misery.

060 During his fire career, Eshelman had fought three fires in one day on three separate occasions. He explained that he would drive two other fire fighters to the blaze, and he and those people would contain the fire. Eshelman would leave those two to mop-up the fire, and he would go to the next fire.

095 Eshelman worked on three different districts on the Boise National Forest. He talked about the differences among those three locations (Landmark, Garden Valley, and Idaho City). He continued to talk about the difference (or similarities) among the fire control officers on the different districts. He talked about being ready to fight fire regardless of where or what job he was doing.

165 Dispatchers, according to Eshelman, would tell someone nearby to report to a fire. That fact was what allowed Eshelman to come to a fire first. He continued to describe the communication involved in reporting and discussing fires in the national forest.



200 Eshelman offered his opinion on whether or not there could be over communication on a fire. He retold a story about encountering bear tracks on a fire line. He said he came on the radio just long enough to mention the need for assistance.

225 During his fourteen years with the forest service, Eshelman worked at many jobs. He felt that the patrolmen job was the one he enjoyed the most. He allowed him to interact with people and to enjoy the outdoors. He also mentioned talking to groups of children at summer camps about forest fires. He said their presentation depended on the age of the children and the number of years they attended the camp.

305 Eshelman felt the only job he did not enjoy was working behind a desk, completing paperwork. He did not like tree planting, but he did enjoy it more than working inside. He also said that he did not like writing tickets to campers; he would rather explain to them the problem and give them a warning ticket.

360 Eshelman never received a full-time appointment with the forest service; he worked on a ten-month contract. He explained what he during his two months away from the forest service. He also talked about being a part of the Man Power Development Training Act (MPDTA). He described, in detail, the Act, including who trained with him like Gordon Stevens and what tasks they accomplished under the Act.

485 **END OF SIDE TWO**  
**TAPE TWO SIDE ONE**

000 [No introduction.] With prompting from the interviewer, Eshelman talked about current fire policy. He felt like Elmer Huston that the leaders of today do not really care about putting the fire out [telephone rings]. He also talked about tangible (domestic animals) and intangible aspects (dedication) that have changed today's fire fighting.

080 Eshelman offered his opinions about current attempts to create a roadless policy for the national forests. He felt that some places in the forest would not be affected by the policy, because of the number of roads already in the area. He also talked about salvaging timber after a forest fire and also selectively logging areas of the national forest. [Telephone rings.]

120 Eshelman talked about how the forest service hired fire crews during his time working for them. He also furnished some advice to people interested in joining the forest service to fight fires. He said getting temporary work was not as difficult as receiving a permanent position.

- 160 He continued to talk about working for the forest service on a temporary basis. He told one story about going to work on Monday and having his supervisor release him because he had reached his total number of hours.
- 180 Eshelman has worked at many jobs during his life. He provided his thought about how his time fighting fires for the forest service fit into his life picture. He thought that the experience for working for the forest service and the government was good. He also said that fighting fires allowed him to help the forests. He talked about practical job skills that he has applied to his other jobs.
- 240 Eshelman told the interviewer that he would participate in a teachers' institute in June 2001. He talked about how many teachers worked in the forest during the summer and how he tried to get along with the different types of people who used the forest in the 1960s and 1970s. He enjoyed his experience with the forest service, but he did not know if he would enjoy working for the forest service today.
- 280 **END OF SIDE TWO**  
**END OF INTERVIEW**

**NAMES AND PLACE INDEX**

Baker, Oregon  
Boise National Forest  
Boise River (Idaho)  
Chenoweth, Bob  
Donner Summit fire (Nevada/California border)  
Goat Creek fire (near Salmon, Idaho)  
Grimes, Phil  
Huston, Elmer  
Idaho City, Idaho  
Kirkham Hot Springs fire (Idaho)  
Larkin, Jim  
Reed, Don  
Smith, Ken  
Stevens, Gordon  
Thorn Creek fire (Idaho)  
United States Forest Service  
Winkler, Bill  
Yellow Pine, Idaho